

Constantine

occurrence between earth and heaven. The double conflagration is certainly suspicious, but tyrants do not, as a rule, set fire to their own palaces when they themselves are in residence, however strong may be their animus against some obnoxious part in the State.

A few months passed and Diocletian published ; second edict ordering the arrest of all bishops and clergy who refused to surrender their " holy books to the civil officers. Then, in the following year came a third, offering freedom to all in prison if they consented to sacrifice, and instructing magistrates to use every possible means to compel the obstinate to abandon their faith. These edicts provoked frenzy of persecution, and Gaul and Britain alone enjoyed comparative immunity. Constantius could not, indeed, entirely disregard an order which bore the joint names of the two Augusti, but he too cared that there was no over-zealousness, and, according to a well-known passage of Lactantius, he allowed the meeting-places of the Christians, the buildings of wood and stone which could easily be restored, to be torn down, but preserved in safety the true temple of God, viz., the bodies of His worshippers.* Elsewhere the persecution may be traced from province to province and from city to city in the mournful and poignant documents known as the *Passions of the Martyrs*. Naturally it varied in intensity according to local conditions and according

ing to the personal predilections of the
magistrate

* **Vcrum** *autem Dei templum, quod est in
hominibus, incoliu servavit.* (*De Mort_t Per sec.*, c.
15).